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INFO EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L TALLINN 000345

SIPDIS
AMEMBASSY ANKARA PASS TO AMCONSUL ADANA
AMEMBASSY ASTANA PASS TO AMCONSUL ALMATY
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL DUSSELDORF
AMEMBASSY BERLIN PASS TO AMCONSUL LEIPZIG
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AMEMBASSY HELSINKI PASS TO AMCONSUL ST PETERSBURG
AMEMBASSY ATHENS PASS TO AMCONSUL THESSALONIKI
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL VLADIVOSTOK
AMEMBASSY MOSCOW PASS TO AMCONSUL YEKATERINBURG

E.O. 12958: DECL: 2019/11/24
TAGS: [PREL](#) [RS](#) [EN](#)
SUBJECT: Deputy PM Ivanov's Non-Visit to Tallinn

CLASSIFIED BY: Marc Nordberg, Political/Economic Chief; REASON:
1.4(B), (D)

Classified by Charge Karen Decker for Reasons 1.4 B & D.

¶1. (SBU) Russian Deputy Prime Minister Sergey Ivanov visited Tallinn November 19 to watch a basketball game between CSKA Moscow (which the press states Ivanov has long supported) and Estonian team BC Kalev Cramo. MFA contacts said the Estonian MFA learned of the visit just hours in advance. The Russian side did not request any meetings, but agreed to the MFA's suggestion that Defense Minister Jaak Aaviksoo sit with Ivanov during the game. Both PM Ansip and FM Paet were out of the country. There were no other meetings. According to MOD contacts, Aaviksoo and Ivanov did not discuss any business, instead limiting their talk to sports and basketball.

¶2. (U) The media found out about the visit when they saw Ivanov at the game. After the match Ivanov told the press, "I do not believe Estonian-Russian political and economic relations will improve any time soon. You know the reasons yourselves." Some Estonian media, however, is painting this visit positively, particularly when contrasted against then-Russian PM Mikhail Fradkov's 2004 visit to Tallinn, when Fradkov refused all meetings, claiming he was going fishing.

¶3. (C) Head of the MFA's Russia Desk Anne Mardiste characterized relations with Russia as not good, but calmer than they have been in the past. Russian media and politicians are not demonizing Estonia as frequently, and Estonia is focusing on areas of practical cooperation. Mardiste joked that Estonia has fallen to sixth place on Russia's enemies list. She listed areas of successful cooperation, such as negotiating a new pension agreement, holding annual consular consultations, regular meetings of bilateral Transport and Lake and Rivers Committees, reaching three agreements on regional search and rescue, Russia's willingness to accept the return of third country illegal aliens, and local cooperation between border guards. Both countries failed to agree on a border treaty, but Estonia is pleased with the manner in which Russia unilaterally demarcated the border. Mardiste also said the Estonian and Russian MFAs have improved communications since FMs Paet and Lavrov met at the OSCE in 2008. However, significant differences of opinion remain. The GOE is not happy with Russian efforts to "protect" and reach out to the Russian minority abroad (including the compatriots policy), Russia's rewriting of history, and efforts to rehabilitate Stalin.

¶4. (C) Comment: Ivanov's refusal to conduct any official business is a strong indication of the coldness of Russian-Estonian relations. High-level visits between the two countries are rare. The only ministerial-level meetings in 2009 occurred when the Russian Minister of Culture visited Tallinn in January and the Estonian Minister of Culture visited Moscow in October. FMs Paet and Lavrov meet occasionally, but only on the margins of events outside either of their countries. Lavrov has a standing invitation to visit Tallinn, but the Estonian MFA reports he has said he will not come until the GOE provides him a good reason to visit. While relations between these neighbors are now correct if frosty, they will not improve until the Russian government at least agrees to meet its Estonian counterparts.

DECKER